

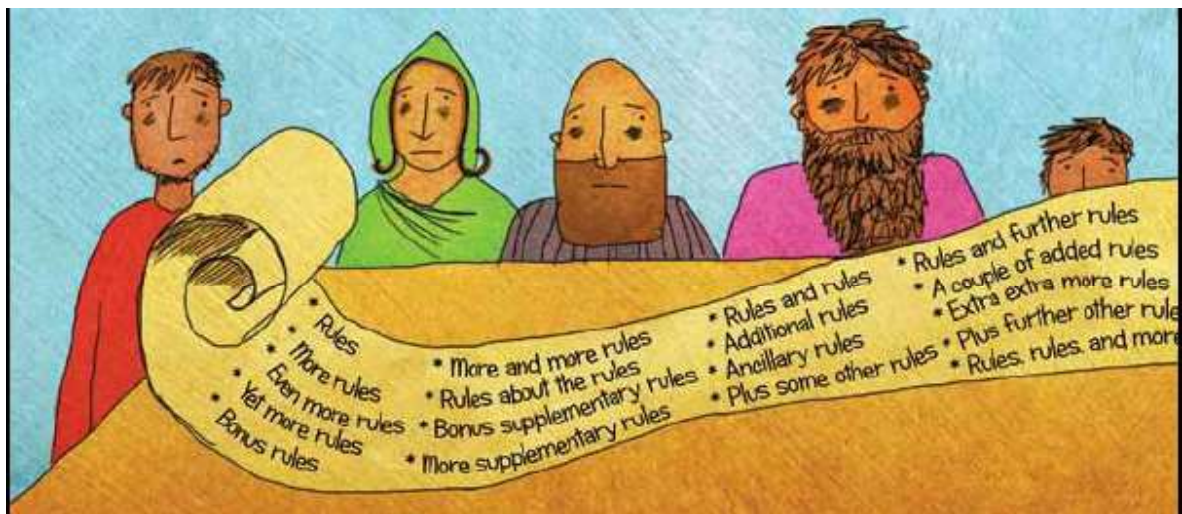
## Get ready!

*God's people return from being slaves, from Nehemiah 8 – 10, Malachi 1, 3 and 4, Ezra 7*

HAVE YOU EVER been to a party that lasted a whole week? How about a sermon that went on all day?

Well, that's what happened to God's people after they came home from being slaves. They had forgotten how God wanted them to live, or who they were supposed to be. So Ezra and Nehemiah read them the rules God had given Moses.

But something odd happened: the more the sermon went on, the sadder they all got. Why? Was the sermon that boring? No, not really. It was strange, you see. As Ezra read the book of rules, it worked like a mirror. It showed them what they were like, and they didn't like



what they saw. They saw that they had not been living the way they should. They saw that they were cruel and selfish.

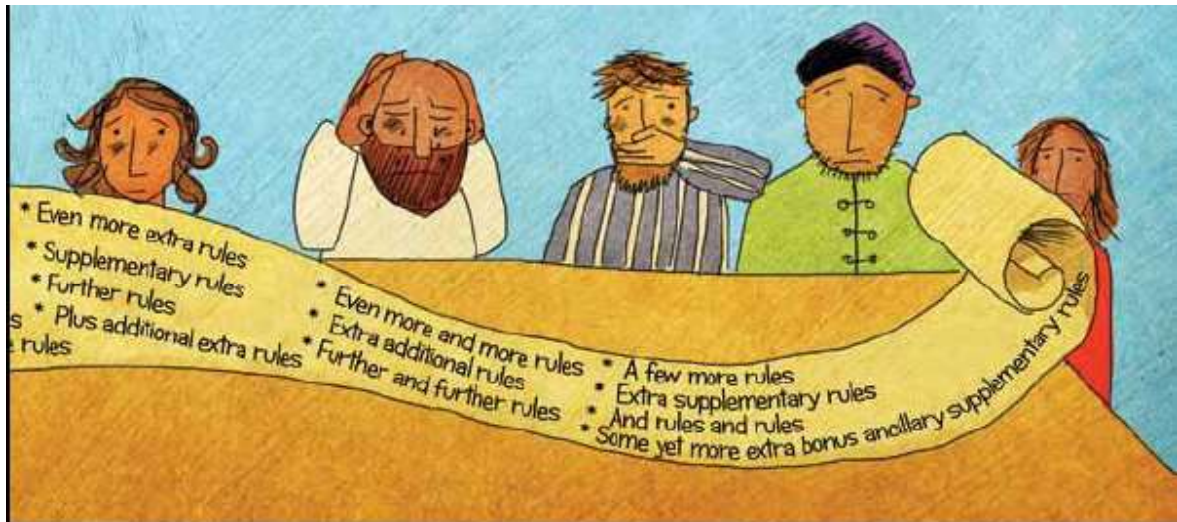
“We’ve blown it,” they cried. “Now God will punish us!”

They thought they knew what God was going to do. But they didn't. Of course, they might have picked up a clue from Ezra's name, which means “Help is here!” And an even stronger one from Nehemiah's name, because

his name means “God wipes away our tears.” And that, as you’ll see, is just exactly what God was getting ready to do.

Ezra looked at God’s children. Great, hot tears were welling up in their eyes and streaming down their cheeks. He stopped his sermon—mid-sentence—and shut the book. “We’re having a party!” he shouted.

And so that’s just what they did! All week long.



“God wants us to be happy!” Ezra said.

All day they listened to stories about the wonderful things God had done for his people. How he made the world. How he gave a special promise to Abraham. How he rescued them from slavery. How he spoke to Moses and showed them how to live. How he brought them to a special land. How he rescued them—no matter what, time after time, over and over again—because of his



Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love.

They remembered how God had always, all through the years, been loving his children—keeping his promise to Abraham, taking care of them, forgiving them. Even when they disobeyed. Even when they ran away from him. Even when they thought they didn't need him.

Then God told his children something more...



I can't stop loving you.  
You are my heart's treasure.  
But I lost you.  
Now I am coming back for you.

I am like the sun that gently shines on you,  
chasing away darkness and fear and death.  
You'll be so happy—  
you'll be like little calves running free  
in an open field.

I am going to send my Messenger—The Promised One.  
The One you have been waiting for.  
The Rescuer.

He is coming. So, get ready!



It had taken centuries for God's people to be ready, but now the time had almost come for the best part of God's Plan.

God himself was going to come. Not to punish his people—but to rescue them.

God was getting ready to wipe away every tear from every eye.

And the true party was just about to begin...